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ABSTRACT

This report, second in a series of eight, highlights some of the findings from two recent surveys of the opinions of adult Californians on products and policies affecting youth tobacco use. The specific focus is on public perceptions of the role of the media in affecting youth tobacco consumption. The surveys were conducted in October and November of 1997 for the California Center for Health Improvement. Of those surveyed, 52%, including 40% of smokers, believed that the media is having a negative effect on children and youth in their attitudes toward smoking. The survey also found that people of color and adults with less than a high school education are more likely to believe the media has a negative effect on youth attitudes about tobacco. Additional research is required to explain the different smoking prevalence rates among age, gender, and ethnic subgroups of California youth and to clarify whether these perceptions are true. Seven of ten Californians surveyed believe that smoking by actors and actresses in movies and on television influences minors to start smoking. The surveys also found that a majority of Californians (57%), including 39% of surveyed smokers, support establishing some rules about how tobacco products are used in movies and television. The very limited support for government standards or prohibitions suggests that early strategies to change tobacco depiction in the media should focus on public education along with initiatives to raise awareness about and within the industry. Some of the programs with the potential to do this are described. The surveys also captured the views of Californians on other issues related to smoking by young people. A majority of Californians surveyed (53%), including 35% of surveyed smokers, believe that increasing tobacco taxes will discourage people from smoking, especially children and youth. Policy recommendations to help prevent tobacco use include supporting and expanding public and private efforts to education and mobilize the entertainment industries to take responsibility for the depiction of tobacco in the media. Other strategies, including increasing state excise taxes on tobacco, are suggested. (Contains seven tables and seven references.) (SLD)

ED 426 121

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Growing Up Well
Focus on Prevention

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UD 032 550

Californians Concerned About Youth Smoking, Majority Believes Media Has Negative Effect

By Deborah Reidy Kelch, M.P.P.A.

Since the enactment of Proposition 99 in 1988, California has implemented an effective and nationally recognized program to prevent and reduce tobacco use among Californians. At 18.6 percent, in 1996, California had one of the lowest adult smoking prevalence rates in the nation, second only to Utah. Still, in recent years, smoking prevalence among California youth ages 12–17 has increased from a low of 8.7 percent in 1992 to a high of nearly 12 percent in 1995, leveling out at 11.2 percent in 1996 (1).

In two recent public opinion surveys conducted in October and November of 1997, the California Center for Health Improvement (CCHI) found widespread public support for continued action to prevent and reduce teen tobacco consumption. The first survey, which covered a range of health issues affecting children and youth, and a follow-up survey which focused specifically on tobacco and tobacco products were conducted for CCHI by The Field Institute in English and Spanish; results are subject to a sampling error of plus or minus 3.2 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

TABLE 1

Majority Believes Media Has Negative Effect on Youth Attitudes About Smoking; People of Color More Likely to Agree

Do you think TV programs, movies, popular music, and advertising are having a very positive, somewhat positive, mixed, somewhat negative or very negative effect on youth in this area — attitudes about smoking?

	VERY NEGATIVE	NEGATIVE	
ALL ADULTS	30%	22%	52%
WHITE (NON-HISPANIC)	24%	23%	47%
LATINO	39%	20%	59%
BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN	38%	19%	57%
ASIAN/OTHER	39%	22%	61%

Source: *Children and Youth Survey*, The Field Institute, October–November 1997.

This report was developed to: highlight findings from these surveys about the role of the media in affecting youth tobacco consumption; and report on selected other tobacco-related survey findings that are relevant to issues under discussion in the state.

Smoking: Starting Young

Any strategy to prevent or reduce tobacco consumption overall must recognize that initiation of tobacco use occurs primarily among children and adolescents. Studies suggest that anyone who does not begin to use tobacco as a child is unlikely to start as an adult. Eighty-nine percent of all people who ever try a cigarette try by age 18 (2, page 1).

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This is the second in an eight-part series of publications, *Growing Up Well*. This report highlights some of the findings from two recent surveys of the opinions of adult Californians on products and policies affecting youth tobacco use. Notably, the report specifically highlights public perceptions about the role of the media (TV programs, movies, popular music and advertising) in affecting youth tobacco consumption. Given the significance of the entertainment industry for California and the recent interest in the issue among the press and policy-makers, the survey findings and policy recommendations offer important new information to guide our state's collective efforts to reduce tobacco use among youth and adults.

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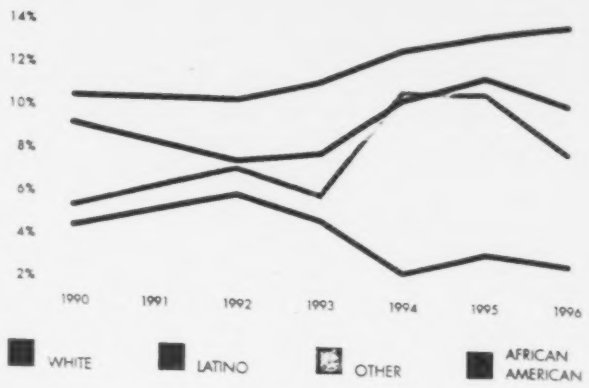
Children and adolescents are starting to smoke at younger and younger ages. The average young smoker begins at age 14.5 and is a daily smoker by age 18. Moreover, among California youth ages 16–17, the number who reported smoking within the last 30 days rose to a high of 22 percent in 1995 before declining to nearly 21 percent in 1996 (1). Notably, 1996 smoking prevalence rates were higher among teen females (12 percent) than teen males (10.5 percent).

Tobacco use among youth is the result of multiple influences and is an extremely complex phenomenon. Therefore, no single cause or influence, and no single program, strategy or policy can sufficiently address the problem. California programs and policies reflect a comprehensive approach to "de-normalize" tobacco use and make tobacco use socially undesirable and unacceptable for adults, thus also making it less attractive for children and youth to imitate adult smoking behavior.

The persistent and growing problem of youth tobacco consumption has prompted researchers, parents, educators, and the health community to search for key influences on youth behavior and to pursue policies and programs aimed at mitigating those influences. Most recently, such attention has been directed at tobacco marketing and advertising that may be specifically aimed at encouraging young people to smoke. Tobacco control agencies and advocates moved to curb these types of tobacco company marketing and advertising, with some limited success. Successful efforts include the following: the recent elimination of the popular cartoon figure, Joe Camel; 1997 California legislation to prohibit tobacco advertising near schools; and, 1996 Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations regulating the sale and marketing of tobacco products to youth.

TABLE 2

California Youth Smoking Prevalence By Race/Ethnicity (1990–1996)

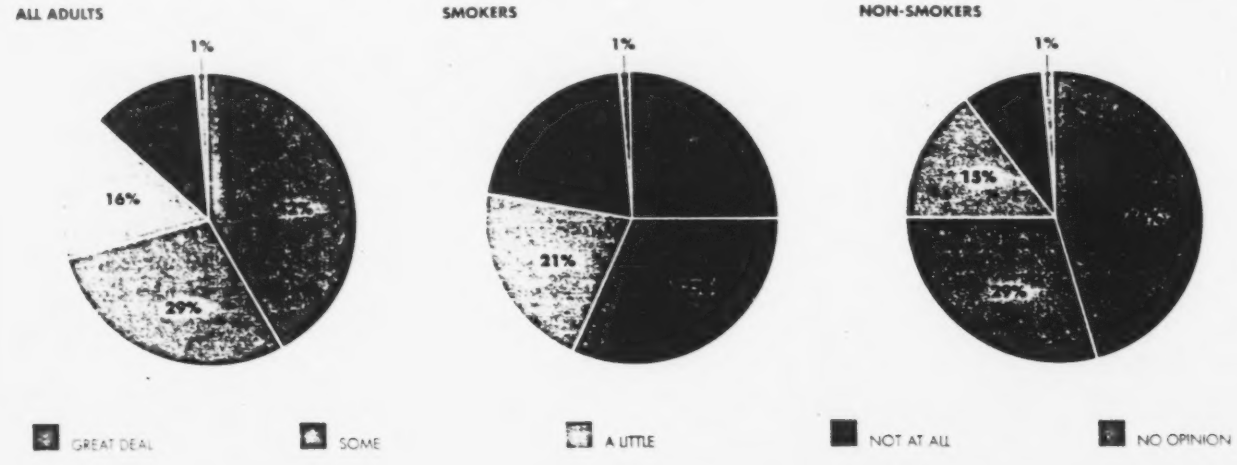


Source: California Department of Health Services (DHS), Tobacco Control Section (TCS), 1997. Results from the *California Tobacco Survey*, 1990, 1992–93 and the *California Youth Tobacco Survey*, 1994–96.

TABLE 3

Seven in Ten Californians Feel Smoking by Actors and Actresses in Movies and TV Influences Minors to Start Smoking

How much do you feel smoking by actors and actresses in movies and television influences minors to start smoking — a great deal, some, only a little or none at all?



Source: September 1997 *Survey*, The Field Institute.

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At the same time, both public and private sector tobacco control constituencies have turned the spotlight on the role of the entertainment industries — movies, television, music, etc. — and their depictions of tobacco use, as another potential element influencing youth tobacco consumption.

Californians Assess the Influence of Media on Youth Attitudes About Smoking

Increasingly, public and private sector stakeholders in the tobacco control movement are concerned that depictions of tobacco use by actors and actresses in film, television and music videos may be sending a message to young people, intended or unintended, that smoking is "cool," glamorous or, at the very least, acceptable. Californians overwhelmingly concur with this view. Of those surveyed, 52 percent, including 40 percent of smokers, believe that the media is having a negative effect on children and youth in their attitudes toward smoking.

The survey also found that people of color and adults with less than a high school education are more likely to believe the media has a negative effect on youth attitudes about tobacco use. Nearly 60 percent of Asians, Black/African Americans and Latinos believe media has a negative effect, while only 47 percent of non-Hispanic Whites share the same view (table 1, page 1). Similarly, 58 percent of those with a high school graduation or less see the media's impact as negative, while only 49 percent of college graduates believe that the media negatively influences youth attitudes about smoking (3).

Although people of color believe that the media has a negative effect on youth attitudes, youth smoking prevalence rates among 12–17 year olds in these ethnic communities are lower than Whites, with a striking difference of more than 11 percentage points between White youths (14.1 percent) and African American youths (2.9 percent)(table 2, page 2). Little is now known about why African American youth have significantly lower smoking rates or the extent to which adult attitudes toward media found in the survey may help in understanding the differences. However, the survey findings, and the differences in smoking prevalence, raise important questions about whether African American youth smoking behavior may be related to cultural attitudes surrounding the media. Moreover, this question is all the more important in light of the fact that while African American *youths* have a significantly *lower* smoking rate than youths in other ethnic groups (table 2, page 2), African American *adults* have a *higher* smoking rate than non-Hispanic Whites or Latino adults.

Additional research is required to better understand and explain the different smoking prevalence rates among age, gender and ethnic subgroups of California youth and to make progress in identifying key influences that affect their behavior. Research could yield insights into the levels and types of media and advertising exposure for different subgroups of young people, their vulnerability to persuasion by media and the personal, family, educational or community influences that may serve to mitigate the effects of any negative media exposure.

Has Tobacco Use in the Media Increased? Californians Have Mixed Views

Seven out of ten Californians, including six out of ten smokers, believe smoking by actors and actresses in movies and TV influences minors to start smoking (table 3, page 2), but Californians have mixed opinions on whether smoking is becoming more or less prevalent in movies and television. While 28 percent felt that smoking is more prevalent in movies and television, 39 percent felt that there is actually less smoking and 27 percent answered that smoking prevalence is about the same (table 4, page 4).

At a November 1997 California Senate informational hearing on "Smoking in the Movies," researchers and health groups testified that depictions of tobacco use in movies and TV appear to be increasing and do not reflect reality, exaggerating actual usage and giving the impression that a majority of adults smoke. They expressed concerns that movies rarely deal with the health consequences of smoking for characters who smoke on screen. They testified that their analyses revealed that tobacco use was, in general, portrayed in a very positive light — associated with youthful vigor, power, good health, looks and professional acceptance.

Tobacco Company Files Show a Strategy To Target Youth

Lawsuits filed against the tobacco industry have resulted in the release of reams of industry documents that tobacco control advocates insist illustrate a strategy by the industry to get young people addicted to tobacco. As just one example, in January of this year, release of internal tobacco industry documents provided compelling new evidence that the industry has targeted young smokers for decades.

The tobacco company memos, written between 1973 and 1990, reveal that at least one tobacco company considered and discussed strategies to reverse declining sales by targeting 14–24 year olds. The documents were obtained in the California case Mangini v. RJ Reynolds Tobacco, Inc., a lawsuit brought by Janet Mangini, an individual who sued to stop the Joe Camel campaign.

One memo clearly stated "If our company is to survive and prosper, over the long term we must get our share of the youth market." Another read, "The Camel Brand must increase its share of penetration among the 14–24 age group... which represent tomorrow's cigarette business." A 1986 memo noted how the Joe Camel campaign would utilize "peer acceptance/influence" to "motivate the target audience to take up cigarettes." More than 80 documents, most of them never before made public, were turned over to the Justice Department.

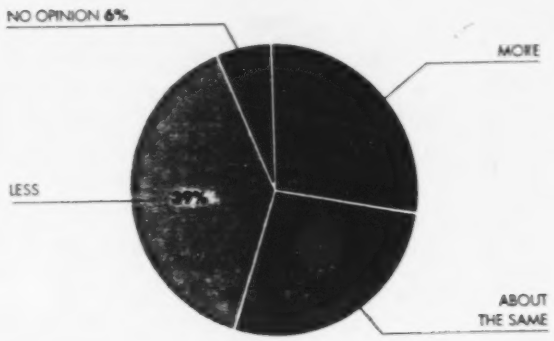
Entertainment industry officials testified that cigarettes can be an expressive tool and a useful prop which an actor or director uses to define a character or to set a mood or tone. They offered that many of today's writers, actors and directors smoke in real life and any perceived increase in tobacco depiction may reflect a generational shift to younger, independent directors who were not exposed to the anti-tobacco sentiment that prompted industry reductions in tobacco use between 1960 and 1980. Representatives did acknowledge that some depictions of smoking can make smoking seem "cool," sophisticated and romantic. They suggested that an educational and consciousness raising campaign may be needed to encourage responsible depiction and to mobilize industry leaders from all entertainment sectors to help reduce tobacco use, particularly among youth.

Two recent studies presented at the hearing concluded that there is an increase in tobacco use in movies. A University of California at San Francisco (UCSF) study of 95 movies made between 1960 and 1996 found that depictions of tobacco use in movies steadily and rapidly increased in the 1990s, after falling in the 1960s and 1970s to an all time low in the 1980s. A 1994 and 1995 survey of popular movies by the American Lung Association's Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down! (TUTD) project found that of 133 popular movies reviewed, 77 percent had smoking scenes.

TABLE 4

Mixed Opinions About Whether Smoking is Becoming More or Less Prevalent in Movies and TV

Over the last three years, do you think there has been more, less or about the same amount of smoking portrayed by actors and actresses in the movies and on TV?

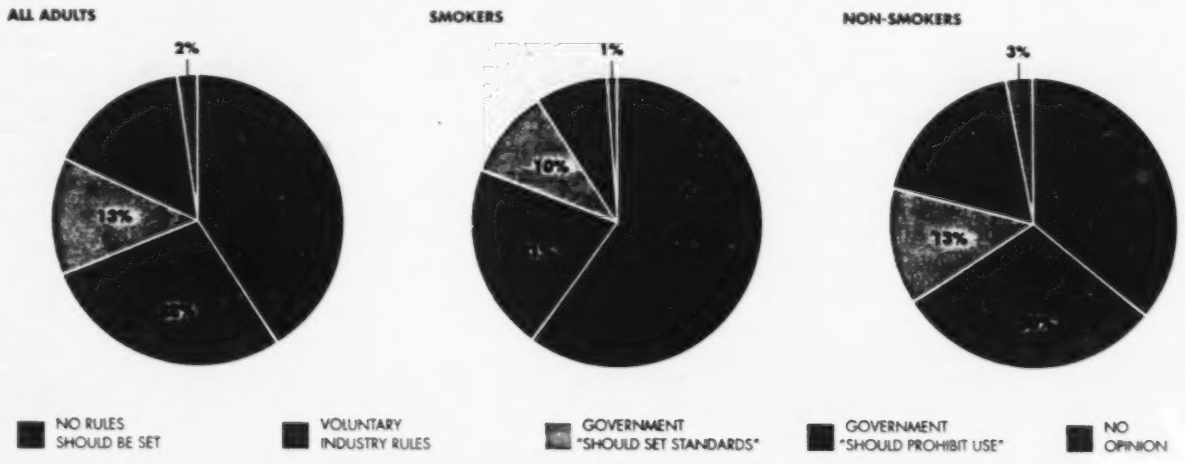


Source: *November 1997 Survey*, The Field Institute.

TABLE 5

Majority of Californians Supports Voluntary or Government Rules Regarding How Tobacco Products Are Used in Movies or on TV

Which of the following statements comes closest to your own opinion about the most appropriate way to discourage the use of cigarettes or tobacco products by the entertainment industry in movies and on TV?



Source: *November 1997 Survey*, The Field Institute.

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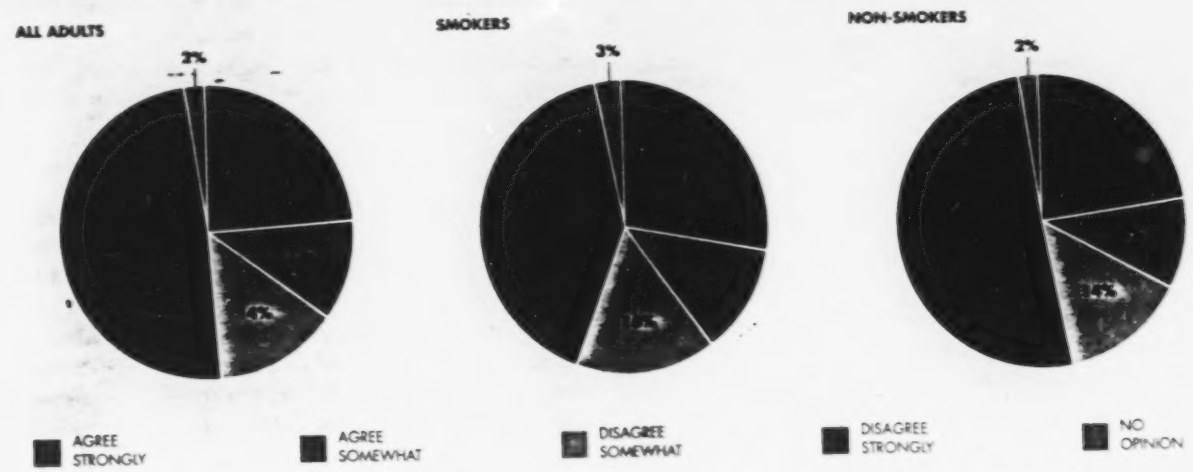
TABLE 6

Most Californians, Including Smokers, Believe Tobacco Companies Deliberately Market Cigarettes to Minors

Please tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with the statement: Tobacco companies do not deliberately market cigarettes to minors.



Source: *November 1997 Survey*, The Field Institute.

Whether or not there is an increase in tobacco depiction, all parties testifying at the hearing agreed that the issue requires further research and attention.

Californians Support Actions to Reduce Tobacco Use In Movies and on TV

The CCHI survey found that a majority of Californians (57 percent), including 39 percent of smokers, support establishing some rules regarding how tobacco products are used in movies and television. Although there was strong support for rules, those surveyed split on whether the rules should be voluntary industry rules (28 percent), government prohibitions (16 percent) or government standards (13 percent)(table 5, page 4).

The very limited support for government standards or prohibitions suggests that early strategies to change tobacco depiction in the entertainment media should focus instead on public education together with initiatives to raise awareness about and within the industry. A number of promising strategies are currently being implemented with the goal of influencing the way the entertainment media uses tobacco in films, television and other venues. These initiatives include:

Next Generation Entertainment Initiative — a project of the Next Generation California Tobacco Control Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide coalition, formed in 1997, to bring together traditional tobacco control constituencies and new public and private sector partners in collaboration around tobacco control.

Working with the Childrens' Action Network and the communications firm Lauter/Green/Isaac, the Alliance played a central role in the creation of an Entertainment Industry Working Group chaired by Richard Masur, President of the Screen Actors' Guild, and including other top industry leaders from the Writers Guild, the Directors Guild, and senior management from major movie and television studios and the recording industry. The Working Group is organized to: provide information to the entertainment industry on tobacco use among youth and the impact of its portrayal in the media; encourage responsible depiction; and, mobilize industry leaders to help prevent and reduce tobacco use, particularly among youth. Entertainment industry groups, including the Next Generation Working Group, met in December 1997 with Vice President Gore and advised him of the collaborative efforts taking place in California between the entertainment industry and the tobacco control community. For more information, contact the Alliance at (916) 552–7643 or the Alliance Communications Consultant at (310) 575–9200.

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Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down! (TUTD) — a project of the American Lung Association of Sacramento-Emigrant Trails, funded by Proposition 99 revenues. The project uses teens to examine tobacco use in current movies, on television and in music videos. TUTD uses three primary approaches: direct youth involvement through the use of trained youth reviewers who review movies, TV shows and music videos for incidences of tobacco use; education and awareness, including the annual "Pink Lung" and "Phlemmie" awards based on how a film handles tobacco depiction; and public education programs designed to develop critical media viewing skills among young people. For more information, call (916) 444–LUNG.

Hollywood on Tobacco (HOT) — a project of Americans for Nonsmokers Rights, funded by Proposition 99 revenues. The project's goal is to develop a better understanding of the entertainment industry. The project will: conduct an ethnographic study of the entertainment industry, based on interviews with industry insiders, to be completed by the Summer of 1998; produce a documentary with KCET of Los Angeles; and, in 1999, host a policy summit on change strategies affecting the media and tobacco. For more information, call (510) 843–0468.

LA Link — a project of the Los Angeles County Health Department, funded with Proposition 99 revenues. The county launched a $500,000 campaign to run anti-smoking ads in local theaters, inspired by a UC Irvine finding that anti-smoking commercials shown before a movie may nullify the negative effects from cigarette depiction in the upcoming film. For more information, call (510) 843–0468.

Californians Support A Variety of Strategies To Prevent Tobacco Use

The CCHI surveys also captured the views of Californians on other key issues and current events that will influence future strategies aimed at preventing and reducing tobacco consumption, including youth consumption. The opinions of Californians on some of these issues are highlighted in this section of the report.

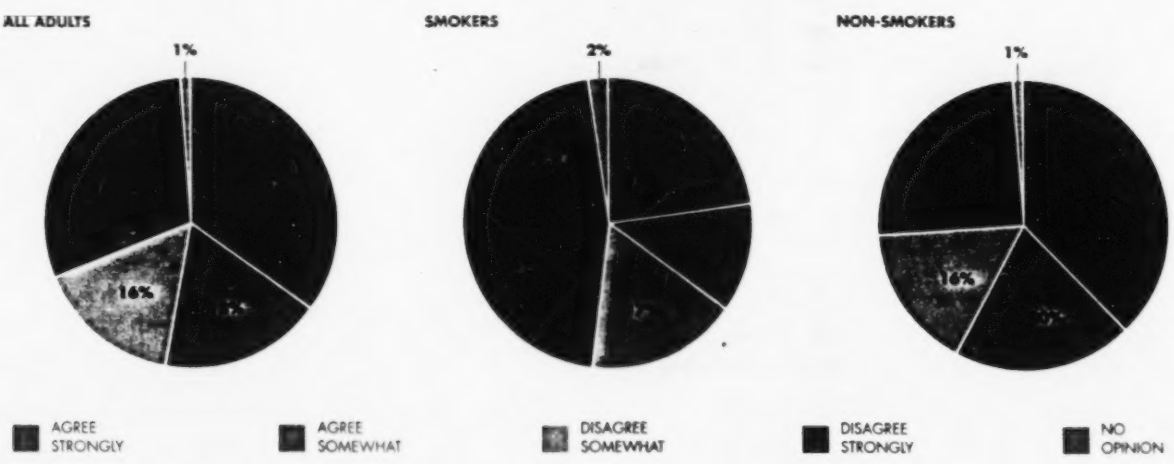
FDA Regulation of Tobacco

In 1996, the FDA asserted its authority to regulate nicotine as an addictive drug and issued strict regulations on the advertising, sale and distribution of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products to children and adolescents. The FDA regulations ban the use of cigarette vending machines in areas accessible to children and adolescents, and eliminate self-service displays and cigarette giveaways. FDA provisions to restrict advertising on cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products have not gone into effect due to pending litigation. The proposed restrictions included a ban on promotional items containing cigarette logos such as tee shirts, caps and sporting goods and elimination of imagery and color in advertising shown or displayed in venues accessible to youth.

TABLE 7

More than Half of Californians Agree — Increasing Tobacco Taxes will Discourage People from Smoking

Please tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with the statement: Increasing state or federal tobacco taxes will discourage people from smoking, particularly children and young people.



Source: *November 1997 Survey*, The Field Institute.

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In January of this year, major health groups called for the FDA to use its authority to regulate the tobacco industry more aggressively, going beyond its initiative to curb youth smoking. Battles on the authority of the FDA continue in court and in Congress. The national settlement with tobacco companies proposed by state attorneys general last summer contains controversial provisions affecting the role of the FDA in the regulation of tobacco products. Health groups and tobacco control advocates oppose the proposed FDA provisions of the national settlement because they argue the provisions would undermine existing FDA regulatory authority. Significantly, two in three Californians, including 48 percent of smokers, agree that tobacco is an addictive drug that should be regulated by the FDA (4).

The proposed national settlement requires federal legislation and several bills have been introduced, each offering a starkly differing vision. The bills differ on key issues such as how much authority the FDA would have to regulate tobacco; how much the tobacco industry would pay in taxes, penalties, and payments; and where the money would go. While there are a number of complex issues raised by the proposed settlement, a primary issue in debate is limitations on the past and future liability of tobacco companies.

Marketing to Youth

The tobacco industry spends $1.7 million daily in California advertising and promotion, including the recent trend toward promotional items popular among youth. Pending lawsuits, the settlement agreement, the debate over the proposed FDA rules, and legislation now before Congress focus attention on the tobacco industry's marketing and promotion practices which many believe have targeted children and youth. In developing the regulations discussed above, FDA relied heavily on studies showing that tobacco advertising was an important factor in young people's tobacco use. One study cited by the FDA found that 30 percent of three year olds and 91 percent of six year olds identified Joe Camel as a symbol for smoking (6, page 6)(see sidebar, page 3.)

While the tobacco industry has denied that it specifically targets children and youth, most Californians (63 percent), including 57 percent of smokers, believe that tobacco companies deliberately market cigarettes to minors (table 6, page 5).

Tax Proposals

Tobacco control strategies being debated at the state and federal levels are also based, in part, on the idea that increasing the cost of cigarettes through industry payments, taxes, or penalties will discourage smoking, particularly among youth. In fact, research has confirmed this conventional wisdom. Higher cigarette prices not only reduce the number of young people that smoke, but also reduce average consumption among those who do smoke (7, page 360).

In California, there are currently several tobacco tax initiatives being circulated or under consideration for the November 1998 ballot, increasing the tobacco tax from .25 cents to $1.00 per pack. In previous CCHI surveys, voters have consistently supported tobacco tax increases as high as $1.00 per pack. The findings from this survey revealed that a majority of Californians (53 percent), including 35 percent of smokers, believe that increasing tobacco taxes will in fact discourage people from smoking, particularly children and youth (table 7, page 6).

Late Breaking Policy Developments

Although the CCHI surveys did not ask Californians their opinions about smoking in bars, because of the potential impact of this policy on California's tobacco control strategy, it was decided to incorporate the following information into this report.

State law which bans smoking in bars, taverns and gaming clubs took effect January 1 of this year under the California Smokefree Workplace Act. The law is intended to protect workers and patrons of these establishments from exposure to second hand smoke. The law was in effect for less than a month when on January 28, 1998, the California State Assembly passed, by a vote of 42–24, AB 297 (Vincent) which would repeal the restriction on smoking in bars, taverns and gaming clubs. AB 297 would not take effect until January 1999 so that bar patrons would still be prohibited from smoking for the remainder of this year. Under the bill, smoking would be prohibited in those establishments after 2001 unless the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration adopts a standard for the "reduction and control of permissible exposure to environmental smoke." The analysis of the Assembly Appropriations Committee concluded that, "the bill appears to have the effect of permanently authorizing smoking in bars and card clubs." The Assembly passed similar legislation in 1997 but the bill died in the Senate. AB 297 will move to the Senate for consideration and public hearings.

Policy Recommendations

Although tobacco use is the result of multiple influences and is an extremely complex phenomenon, perhaps one fact provides a focus for the development of policies to *prevent* tobacco use: anyone that does not begin to use tobacco as a child is unlikely to start as an adult (2, page 1). Therefore, within this context, and based on the research and survey findings about the role of the media in affecting youth tobacco consumption, the following recommendations are offered for consideration:

- Support and expand public and private efforts to educate and mobilize the entertainment industries to take responsibility for depiction of tobacco in the media and to encourage their active participation in working to prevent and reduce youth tobacco consumption.
- Continue to implement comprehensive strategies to "de-normalize" tobacco use and make tobacco use socially undesirable and unacceptable for adults, as a long-term strategy to break the intergenerational cycle of tobacco addiction. For example, studies find that restrictions on smoking in public places, or state and local laws to limit smoking in restaurants and schools, have been shown to significantly reduce smoking among 18–24 year olds (7).
- Eliminate all elements of tobacco advertising and promotional programs that encourage tobacco use among minors through strong, clearly defined and effective local, state and federal policies and regulation.
- Educate parents, teachers, health providers, health plans and the public about strategies to prevent youth tobacco consumption.
- Vigorously enforce and expand, where necessary, California restrictions limiting youth access to tobacco products.
- Consider the advantages of increasing the state excise tax on cigarette and tobacco products, consistent with public support for such an increase, as a deterrent to youth tobacco use. A portion of the revenues should be allocated to programs focused on youth and reducing youth tobacco consumption.
- Continue and intensify mass media campaigns, including Proposition 99 funded anti-tobacco advertisements, to counteract the image appeal of pro-tobacco messages aimed at children and youth.

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